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ABSTRACT

This report presents the findings of a Canadian study that in established a part-time instructional program for a small number of Punjabi-speaking women immigrants and traced their uses of literacy and English in classroom and home settings. Measures of literacy and language use were taken during the 6-month instructional period and 4 months later. Analysis of classroom and interview data indicate that participants' efforts to teach and acquire literacy in a second language focused on five aspects of knowledge, including: language code, especially vocabulary; self-control strategies and schematic representations for reading and writing; personal knowledge; social knowledge; and social experience. A major instructional challenge was to create learning tasks to address all five aspects coherently and holistically while providing sufficient guidance and practice in each to foster appropriate consolidation of knowledge. Long-term impacts of language and literacy learning on the women's lives appeared in more frequent reading for information in English, interactions with children's schools, telephone communications, formulaic writing, and use of the local library and public health unit. Accuracy in certain morphemes and control of English syntax increased slightly in the women's writing. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Learning literacy and language among Indo-Canadian women

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Abstract: This paper reports findings from an action research project which set up a part-time instructional program for a small number of Punjabi-speaking women immigrants to Canada then traced their uses of literacy and English in classroom and home settings over six months of instruction then four months later. Analyses of classroom and interview data indicate that participants' efforts to teach and acquire literacy in a second language focused on five aspects of knowledge: language code; self-control strategies and schematic representations for reading and writing; personal knowledge; social knowledge; and social experience. A major dilemma for instruction was to create learning tasks to address all five aspects of literacy coherently and holistically while providing sufficient guidance and practice in each aspect of literacy to foster appropriate consolidation of knowledge. Long-term impacts of language and literacy acquisition on the women's lives appeared as more frequent reading for information in English, interactions with their children's schools, telephone communications, formulaic writing, and use of their local library and public health unit. The women's accuracy in certain morphemes and control over English syntax increased slightly in their writing.

Little systematic research has addressed issues of learning and instruction for adult immigrant populations needing to acquire literacy and the majority language in North America despite long-standing recognition of this complex educational situation in Canada and the U.S. (D'Anglejan, Renaud, Arseneault, & Lortie, 1984; Penfield, 1986; Wallerstein, 1983; Weinstein, 1984) and its relation to work opportunities and other forms of social participation, especially for women (Anderson & Lynam, 1987; Janson, 1981; Richmond, Kalbach & Verma, 1980; Seward & McDade, 1988; Strand, 1983). Recent educational inquiry on this topic has advocated approaches which are sensitive to the local situations of particular ethnic groups, given the diversity of cultural, linguistic, and contextual factors which obtain in various circumstances (Auerbach, 1989, 1990; Burnaby, 1989; Dubin, 1989; Giltrow & Colhoun, 1989; Hornberger, 1989; Klein &

Dittmar, 1979; Perdue, 1984; Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1989). Moreover, considerable attention has focused on the need to distinguish relations between language acquisition, literacy acquisition, and cultural adaptation among such populations (Classen, 1988; Cumming, 1989; Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Giltrow & Colhoun, 1989; Fishman, Riedlerberger, Koling & Steele, 1985; Hammond, 1989; Hornberger, 1989; Mastai, 1980; Sticht, 1988; Wallerstein, 1983; Weinstein, 1984).

The present project assumed that to understand how a specific minority population approaches literacy learning and instruction, research needed to create an educational context which would make significant efforts to provide culturally-relevant instruction then to assess its processes and outcomes in case study fashion. This approach follows initiatives reported for Hispanophones (Moll, 1989; Moll & Diaz, 1987), native Hawaiians (Au et al., 1986), and Haitians (Auerbach, 1990) in the U.S. as well as various other minority cultures internationally (Auerbach, 1989; Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988). Particular concerns in the present project were (a) creating an instructional environment suitable to the situations and characteristics of a distinct minority population not usually served by conventional adult education, (b) documenting participants' efforts to teach and learn a second language and literacy concurrently in classroom settings, and (c) assessing the impact of language and literacy acquisition on participant's lives.

Context

The project addressed the situation of Punjabi women in Vancouver, Canada, where a large Sikh population from the Indian state of the Punjab has established itself (numbering about 26,000 within the greater Vancouver area; 1986 Census) in recent decades while retaining many cultural practices and values. As Gibson (1988) concludes from her ethnographic study of a

similar community in a smaller California town, the Punjabi Sikh population has accommodated well to North America with very little assimilation into the majority society. However, numerous sources indicated this cultural group is poorly served by adult education locally (Jackson, 1987; Selman, 1979), particularly women (Seward & McDade, 1988; Selman, 1979) for whom literacy is a pervasive social constraint carrying over from the general situation in India (Rao, 1979; Stromquist, 1989) and participation in mixed gender classes is often culturally discouraged (Jackson, 1987; Selman, 1979).

The area of Vancouver selected for the project had a concentration of over 3,000 people whose mother tongue is Punjabi, forming about 18% of the total population of 17,000 in this one sector of the city (City of Vancouver, 1989). Although little direct information on the composition of this population is available, data from Canada's 1986 census (Secretary of State, 1989; Seward & McDade, 1988) suggest this Punjabi immigrant population could be expected to contain about twice as many women as men who do not speak English, the majority of whom might have had only five to twelve years of schooling in India before immigrating to Canada, have possessed few distinct occupational skills, and have landed in Canada over the past decade to enter "arranged marriages" with husbands already residing in Vancouver.

Bilingual ESL literacy classes and child care services were offered free of charge two afternoons per week over six months (September 1989 to March 1990) to Punjabi-speaking women at a non-profit agency with an established reputation for community service in the neighborhood. Thirteen women volunteered at the start of the program, nine continued for four months, and six completed the duration of the program. Attrition was mainly due to family relocations, participants taking full-time employment, and one severe illness. All participants initially responded to a television interview with the course instructor (herself an immigrant from the Punjab who usually taught ESL at a local

college) aired in Punjabi on a local multicultural channel, although newspaper, poster, and radio notices were also used to publicize the project. Each participant provided informed consent for the research in response to a tape-recorded and written protocol describing the project in Punjabi and English. Community involvement in the project was obtained through an advisory committee with representatives of 10 educational and other agencies serving the adult Indo-Canadian population in the city.

The 13 participating women used Punjabi as their dominant language in almost all home and social situations, were ages 23 to 31, had spent 3 to 13 years in Canada, had completed 9 to 12 years of school in India, had 1 to 3 children, had husbands employed as laborers or technicians who had lived in Canada most or all of their lives, and had annual family incomes of $19,000-$66,000. None had previously taken formal courses of any kind in Canada. Several held part-time jobs in janitorial, restaurant, packing, or agricultural work though none were skilled positions. All of the women indicated they wished to improve their English and literacy in order to gain more personal independence, interact with the majority society, and obtain further education or "clean" work (e.g. clerical or sales jobs). All indicated they had no more time to devote to English or literacy studies than the six hours per week of classes because of responsibilities to immediate and extended families and part-time work. The majority brought pre-school children to the classes, having no other means of relieving themselves of child care responsibilities. Two Punjabi-speaking child care workers were employed over most of the duration of the project.

Initial assessments showed these women spoke English with very limited proficiency ($\bar{X}$=1.5 on a scale of 4) (e.g., very restricted vocabularies, accents which interfered with comprehension, little capacity to maintain conversations), were able to write short phrases in English but hardly able to compose

extended texts, and read with limited comprehension in their mother tongue ($\bar{X}$=46%, s.d.=15.2 on a text recall task, compared to a sample of 5 Punjabi translators, journalists, and teachers who scored $\bar{X}$=81%, s.d.=4.1). Although no claims can be made that these volunteer participants represented the larger population of Punjabi women immigrants in Vancouver, their profiles do suggest these women were characteristic of the adult female population in Canada which demographic studies have indicated are especially in need of ESL literacy education (see Seward & McDade, 1988).

Curriculum decisions were determined by the instructor in consultation with students about their interests and perceived learning needs, along with some input and feedback from the researchers and advisory committee. (Cumming [1990] describes the curriculum rationale in detail.) Units of study focused on libraries, public health services, banking services, children's schools, and job search strategies, each forming periods of approximately one month of content-focused instruction (see Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989). Instruction used aspects of reciprocal modeling (Brown & Palinscar, 1989) and cooperative inquiry (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987) in various reading, writing, and conversation tasks, including frequent visits by guest informants and field experiences. This approach was supplemented by more conventional ESL exercises developed or chosen by the instructor from existing materials. Readings and other literate tasks (such as pamphlets, newspaper articles, forms, letters) were mostly contributed by participating students or gathered during field experiences at relevant institutions. Classes were taught primarily in English, supplemented by some Punjabi for explanations of terms or concepts or peer-group identification (much in the same manner as Guthrie & Guthrie [1987] describe for Chinese-English bilingual classes).

Data Collection and Analyses

All classes were documented through participant-observation by one of the researchers, producing written records of all classroom events and direct transcriptions of selected spoken interactions throughout the full period of instruction. Jaswinder Gill, who is female and is bilingual in Punjabi and English, wrote observational records during classes along with reflective accounts after tutoring groups of the students or teaching occasional classes, combining methods of classroom observation and narrative inquiry (Chaudron, 1988; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). These data were analyzed to establish generally how students and the instructor collectively constructed the process of literacy and language learning. In addition, all participants were interviewed individually at three intervals of two months, then again four months after the period of instruction, using a fixed schedule of open-ended questions and self-reports of frequency of reading and writing a comprehensive range of text types in Punjabi and English (adapted and extended from Griffiths & Wells, 1983). Responses to the interviews were tape-recorded in Punjabi, transcribed and translated into English, and then coded with a second coder (97% agreement on a randomly selected 10% of the data).

Findings

The analyses reported here describe the kinds of literate knowledge which the students and instructor focused on during classroom activities as well as changes in participants' uses of literacy in English in their personal lives and in a few aspects of their writing over the period of the research.

Literate knowledge in classroom learning

Although the classroom data gathered in the project could be analyzed in numerous ways (see Chaudron, 1988), the present description sought a broad, impressionistic account of the aspects of language and literacy which participants attended to over the full period of instruction. This broad level of

analysis was chosen because no previous research (that we are aware of) has described the naturally-occurring processes of concurrent language and literacy learning among adults in classroom settings; the present processes of classroom study were probably influenced in unique ways by the common cultural background of the participating students and teacher as well as the innovative curriculum; and relations between language and literacy learning are of current pedagogical interest for adult minority education (Auerbach, 1989, 1990; Cumming, 1989, 1990, 1991; Klassen, 1988; Hornberger, 1989). This approach presumes that the classroom discourse was cooperatively constructed (i.e., by both students and the instructor), patterned in recurrent routines, and focused on relevant kinds of knowledge (Breen, 1986; Campbell, 1986; Mehan, 1979).

The focus of learning and instruction documented alternated between five general aspects of knowledge: language code; self-control strategies and schematic representations for text production and comprehension; personal knowledge; social knowledge; and social experience. Most literate tasks performed in the classes visibly combined several of these aspects of knowledge, shifting attention between each aspect of knowledge depending on instructional, situational or learning emphases, individual knowledge lacks, or personal interests.

language code

Considerable attention in the classes focused directly on the language code of English (and sometimes Punjabi), particularly for the identification and comprehension of unfamiliar vocabulary. Students' queries about readings usually highlighted particular words or phrases they did not know, although some attention was also devoted to other aspects of the language code such as syntactic or morphological patterns or spelling. The instructor and students frequently collaborated in questioning routines about the meaning of words or phrases aimed

at comprehension of a text, as in the following sequence reviewing a permission letter to attend a school concert brought home by one of the women's children. The mother brought the letter into the classes because she was unable to understand it, e.g., originally thinking that her child was going to perform a concert rather than attend one. Students had been asked to prepare comprehension questions for one another in one of their first efforts at Brown & Palincsar's (1989) technique of reciprocal modeling:

Instructor: What does attend mean?

Student 1: To perform.

Instructor: To perform or watch?

Student 2: To watch.

Student 3: That students are going to watch.

Student 4: Who is going to attend?

Several students: The students.

Instructor: Who is going to perform?

Several students: The Vancouver Symphony Orchestra.

Student 5: What will they do at the Orpheum Theatre?

Student 6: The students will be attending this concert.

Student 5: What is the total cost of attending?

Student 6: The total cost is $5.00.

Instructor: Is that right?

Students scan text, not responding.

Student 1: Do you think this show is expensive?

Student 6: What?

Student 1: Do you think this show is expensive?

Student 6: This show is worthwhile. (reading inappropriately from text)

Student 1: Do you think this show is expensive?

Student 6: Excuse me?

Student 1 explains in Punjabi, emphasizing that $2.50 is very cheap.

Student 7: What does subsidize mean?

Students are silent as they scan the text.

Instructor: [Student 1] should know the answer. She looked it up in the dictionary.

Student 1: Subsidize means to pay something.

Instructor: To pay.

Student 1: Part of. To pay part of the fee. Subsidize means to pay part of the fee.

Instructor: How do you say it in Punjabi?

Student 1 explains in Punjabi.

Although attention in this sequence focused on the meaning of individual words in English, as well as practice of question and answer patterns, the students and instructor alike appeared to use this focus to build up a piece-meal interpretation of the text. In van Dijk & Kintsch's (1983) terms, the participants frequently attended to verbatim representations of individual words while trying to construct propositional representations of ideas in the text as well as an overall situational representation of the text's purpose and context (see Cumming, Rebuffot & Ledwell [1989] for related findings on individuals reading in a different second language context). At the same time, participants appeared to be rehearsing simple patterns of verbal interaction and to be using their common mother tongue as a supportive means of reference and verification.

self-control and schemata for reading and writing

At other times, attention focused less on the language code and more on self-control strategies and schematic representations

for interpreting or producing texts, i.e., skills more conventionally associated with textual literacy. All students had a basic facility with the script of English, could write simple letters or descriptions, and decode the language while reading; but most lacked higher-order skills for planning, self-monitoring, knowledge integration, or forming schematic representations of texts (e.g., as described in Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). In group readings, for instance, Jaswinder's tutoring prompted several students to structure more global interpretations of an information pamphlet explaining the functions of the Vancouver Public Health Unit:

> I work with the first group on the first paragraph. This is by far the simplest part of the pamphlet, and right away it is obvious that the students are starting at the level of individual words, e.g. what does this mean? I ask the students to use diagrams to help them, but they are not sure where to start. I offer a few leading questions, e.g. who works in the health unit? One student reads out the names of the personnel, although she doesn't know a few of the terms, e.g. speech pathologist, therapist, nutritionist. I mention that it is important to get the main idea about the personnel structure of the Health Unit. I ask her to draw a box with the Health Unit in the center and to add all the people who work there. I tell her to add only the ones that she and her partner know. They are able to write 5 or 6 familiar terms. With the remainder, I encourage them to guess what they could be. Slowly, with probing questions, they are able to come up with 3 or 4 more (nutritionist, speech pathologist, therapist). They seem to be able to guess by the context and decoding the roots of the words. Once this is done, I ask them to guess what the word "network" is in the paragraph. One student labels the diagram "network" and says, "this is a network, a group of people and services". We go through the same procedure with the second paragraph on the services offered at the Health Unit. The students draw a diagram of this then try to guess the meanings of new words. After they finish the second paragraph, the instructor asks them to put the diagram on the blackboard and explain what the pamphlet says. They seem to do this quite well. The other groups had gotten bogged down with vocabulary again.

A focus on self-control strategies often occurred while students were writing extended texts. The two following sequences again show Jasvinder working with individual students while they composed brief reports on a field trip they had taken to the local public health unit. In the first sequence, attention focuses on students' knowledge to plan and elaborate details in a manner appropriate to a formal written register. The second sequence focuses on strategies for monitoring and diagnosing one's own written text:

> Two students have difficulty elaborating on a topic. I have to ask a lot of questions to get them to think in this way. For example, Student 2 has written, "The Health Unit program for seniors". I ask what kind of programs. She responds, "homemaker and special classes". I ask what kind of classes. She says, "about health care". I ask, what else? She says there were others but she can't remember. After a few seconds she says that they have a program at the community centre for Indian seniors. Each time I ask her to note these down for her outline. We go through this with each topic and eventually she expands her outline. At this point it is obvious that this kind of writing is new for both students. They don't have a conceptual framework of what a report should be, what to include, or how to organize it.
>
> One student finishes her draft of the report early and asks me to go over it with her. My main impression is that she has made a coherent report but there are many simple spelling and agreement errors. She reads each sentence to me then looks to me to see if there are any errors. I ask her to look herself, but rarely is she able to pinpoint any errors. Then I isolate the phrase where I think an error is. Almost invariably she is able to point to and correct the error herself. Once it is isolated it is fine, but she doesn't seem able to identify it herself in her own writing.

personal knowledge

Other aspects of the classroom instruction and learning involved associating knowledge in written texts with knowledge that the students already possessed personally. The participating women were, of course, individually knowledgeable, but little of this knowledge was situated in reference to reading

or writing. For example, they were unaccustomed to using writing to document and assess their experiences or to use reading as a means for obtaining and analyzing information. As shown in the following discussion around a newspaper article on arranged marriages among the local Sikh population, the learners sometimes found themselves unable to understand phrases while reading that they otherwise knew from personal experience. Moreover, much of their process of gaining literacy in these situations appeared to involve learning how to talk about their ideas and experiences in relation to written passages (see Wells, 1990):

Instructor: Do you have any questions about that?

Student 1: Green light? What does green light mean?

Instructor: At a street corner, what color are the traffic lights? What does the red light mean?

Student 1: Stop.

Instructor: And the green light.

Student 1: To go.

Instructor: And here, who is going to decide on the marriage? Who will give the green light?

Student 1: The father will decide.

Student 2: To shop around?

Student 3: The father will look around for a wife.

Instructor: What do you think about this sentence? How do you feel. I have some strong feelings. How about you?

Student 1: It is okay.

Student 2: It sounds a bit strange. (in Punjabi)

Student 3: He is saying he has no respect for women. (in Punjabi)

Instructor: It makes women sound like something you buy in a shop. It is like buying and selling.

> Student 4: He wants to find a woman to walk behind the man. Like in a wedding. (In Punjabi) He wants a "servant" to his sons. (In Punjabi) He doesn't care about the woman.

social knowledge

Considerable attention also focused on knowledge of social institutions and practices associated with them, demonstrating the extent to which language and literacy are organized in relation to specific cultural contexts (Street, 1984; see also Auerbach, 1989; Klassen, 1988; Weinstein, 1984). Like other immigrants to a new society, and despite their relatively lengthy residence in Canada, these Indo-Canadian women were unfamiliar with many of the literate practices, assumptions, and values organized around common public institutions in Vancouver. This was evident in virtually all of the field experiences organized for the classes, which took the women to seemingly commonplace agencies relevant to their lives but in which they had never before been. The two following accounts record Jaswinder's surprise at the extent of this unfamiliarity, first in regard to public schools then in regard to literate practices associated with obtaining employment:

> The instructor went over the idea of a field trip to a school. I was surprised by how little any of them knew about schools in Canada. Only two of them had ever been inside of one, and they had only been to parent-teacher conferences once with their husbands. They did not know what classrooms looked like nor what different things could be found in a school. They were all keen on the idea of visiting a school and being able to see a class. They decided it would be best to do this in pairs.

> While talking with a few students after class I thought they would be interested in having their own resumes prepared. But this was not a priority for them. In fact during the class, they had paid little attention to the instructor's description of the model resume. No one took notes and most doodled or looked outside. I think this was jumping too far ahead for them. They were not sure of the purpose or necessity for a resume. None had ever seen one before or been asked to produce

> one. At this point they have difficulties even filling out the basic application forms for jobs. For example, they did not know what to put for categories like health, hobbies, or what to include from their own lives. It's a question of knowing the value and relevance of these for a work situation.12/

social experience

An additional aspect of learning literacy in the second language and culture appeared to be experiential, actually performing literate tasks in relevant situations. For the most part, supportive, individual coaching was required to develop this aspect of knowledge as students independently engaged in tasks they had not previously conducted or for which they were unaware of certain implicit "rules" of appropriateness. This kind of learning necessarily had to occur outside the classroom in locations like banks, employment centers, and social service agencies because of the great number of unpredictable, associated circumstances and the need for individuals to integrate and practice relevant actions individually:

> After the library tour, students go up to the counter in groups of threes to get their cards. Most of the students are eventually able to fill out the simple application form for the library card. Some have problems with words like "initial" and "signature". Some have considerable difficulty with the section on date of birth because they are asked to put "the month and day". Most enter the appropriate information but not in the appropriate places, i.e., in the boxes. Some write above the boxes and some underneath. I try to help by pointing out where they should locate their writing. It is clear that few of the students have ever filled out a form of this type.

dilemmas for instruction

The accounts above expose the complexity of knowledge types and integration processes fundamental to literacy acquisition, a complexity which is seldom so visible among student populations that already possess knowledge of the language code, certain higher order skills for writing and reading, customs of talking

about personal experiences in reference to texts, knowledge of common social institutions and practices, and experience using literacy in routine situations. A major dilemma for instruction was creating learning tasks that would integrate each kind of knowledge in a coherent, holistic way, given that the participating women needed to acquire most of this linguistic, literate, and cultural knowledge concurrently.

As a consequence, instruction and student performance in the classes tended to focus on only one or two of the relevant kinds of knowledge, neglecting others. This tendency seemed to reduce the complexity of learning into teachable or learnable units so they could be attended to, practiced, and consolidated. However, this process would often result in students merely displaying knowledge they already possessed, rehearsing simple question and answer routines, or engaging in other behaviors typical of traditional, teacher-centered instruction. In part, such behaviors seemed to follow from expectations for traditional classroom activity that participants transferred from their prior experiences in India, and thus were culturally-relevant. But the present documentation showed instruction to be more culturally-relevant to participants' immediate situations and learning purposes in instances when it attempted simultaneously to provide language explanation and practice, foster new literacy skills, build on personal knowledge, familiarize participants with relevant social institutions, and support them through tasks in real life situations.

Long-term impacts

uses of English literacy

The impacts of the women's acquiring language and literacy were traced by comparing their frequencies of using English and literacy in their daily lives as reported in interview data collected at two-month intervals over the period of instruction then four months after the classes were completed. Data were

collected in reference to a comprehensive range of text types, reading and writing functions, and social situations. Analyses of the differentiation in these uses of literacy across Punjabi and English have been reported in Cumming (1991), showing a distinct shift towards the use of English literacy and communication over time (with the exception of reading religious texts in Punjabi) as the women came to interact more with the dominant society, particularly for consumer and education-related functions. Appendix A shows the detailed data on uses of English literacy grouped, for ease of reference, into general categories of reading, writing, language uses in the community, and language uses at home. Group means are reported for three intervals: beginning of the classes, end of the classes, and four months after the classes were completed.

The women's reading in English increased from about once per month at the start of the classes to several times per week at the end of the classes. Interestingly, after the period of instruction, this rate increased to almost daily for reading newspapers and other information sources such as advertising flyers, public notices, and mail, although the women's reading for pleasure and to study English dropped off considerably after the classes ended. Their uses of writing in English increased from a monthly to weekly frequency during the period of instruction, but this was mostly related to homework exercises and was not sustained after classes ended--with the exception of completing forms and signatures (mostly for commercial transactions or employment applications).

The women's uses of English in the community increased substantially in several domains. The most distinct increase was in regards interactions with their children's schools, which occurred less than once per month at the start of the classes, increased to weekly during the period of instruction, then was reported to occur several times per week later on. A nearly comparable increase related to the women's uses of telephone

communications in English, which increased to almost daily, although most of this communication involved taking messages for their husbands' businesses, since the women initiated their own calls only about once per week. Over the same period of time, the majority of women became regular users of their local library and public health unit. They reported using English more frequently in their daily routines, but they said their uses of English for shopping and banking functions did not change appreciably from a rate of several times per week over this period.

Overall, participants reported that their senses of personal change over the period of the research centered on feelings of greater self-confidence, expansion of their social functions, and employment opportunities (at the end of the data collection, six participants were regularly employed; three were registered for further education programs). The women reported the major constraining factors on the time they could devote to studying or using English literacy was their family commitments, particularly for child care and their husbands' extended families. A secondary, implicit factor was their husbands having assumed major responsibilities for most family commercial and institutional transactions, although most of the women appeared to have husbands and school-age children who supported their English studies and encouraged them to develop greater personal independence.

indicators of language acquisition

Analyses were also conducted on written texts that the six women who completed the classes produced at the beginning and end points of the instruction. Composing, however, was not a major emphasis of the instruction as the women perceived it to have little functional value for their social situations. The compositions chosen for comparison were descriptive narratives of personal experiences: (a) an account of how they came to Canada

written in late September, 1990 ($\bar{X}$ number of words = 592) and (b) an account of their experiences in the ESL literacy classes written in late March, 1991 ($\bar{X}$ number of words = 418). As indicators of language acquisition, analyses were conducted on the women's uses of seven morphemes in these texts, following procedures used in numerous previous studies of second language acquisition (Ellis, 1986; Peyton, 1989).

For the two texts assessed, the women's uses of past tense markers improved from 23% to 52% accuracy, uses of regular plurals improved from 33% to 75% accuracy, and uses of articles improved from 50% to 79% accuracy. Uses of copula "be" decreased in accuracy from 80% to 64% but these structures appeared very infrequently in the later text. The three other morphemes, progressive "-ing", progressive auxiliary "be", and third person agreement, did not occur with enough frequency in either of the texts to warrant calculations (because most of the writing was phrased in the past tense and first person). Counts of words per T-Units in these same texts showed an overall increase from 6.8 to 7.6 words/T-Unit, indicating the women's control of written syntax tended to increase slightly over the six months of instruction.

Implications

Findings from this project indicate that the short duration of culturally-relevant English literacy instruction provided for these immigrant women had discernible impacts on their capacities to participate in certain fundamental domains in the majority society, to read more frequently for information in English, and to write with improved accuracy and control in English. The present findings are the only ones that we are aware of providing specific evidence of the effects of ESL literacy instruction on adult immigrants in North America. The general significance of the findings, however, must be tempered by the modest changes documented in the women's social uses of English and literacy and

by consideration of the very small number of people who participated in the project, all of one gender, culture, and neighborhood. Of particular concern for educational policy is the extent to which such a limited amount of instruction appeared to contribute directly to the women's increased interactions with their children's schools, reading for information in English, and uses of such public facilities as libraries and health units. The general value of the kind of instruction provided would appear to be as a necessary "bridging" step from non-participation in the majority society toward more formal kinds of adult language, vocational, or academic education, potentially leading to fuller social participation and personal independence.

Analyses of the processes of classroom instruction documented in this project provide a preliminary, impressionistic account of the complex aspects of knowledge addressed in instruction for adult ESL literacy: acquisition of the language code, self-control strategies and schematic representations for reading and writing, situating personal knowledge in reference to texts, social knowledge of institutional and cultural practices, and experiential knowledge performing literate tasks in relevant contexts (cf. Hornberger, 1989). Addressing all of these aspects of knowledge holistically poses a major challenge for instruction, even when they are approached through what Wells (1990, p. 398) calls a "transactional construction of understanding" between an instructor and learners. Above and beyond the need to treat literacy acquisition as "situated cognition" (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989) emerges the problem of promoting individual learners' access to and integration of an extremely diverse range of linguistic, cognitive, cultural and experiential knowledge (cf. Prawat, 1989)--and doing so in a manner which preserves their integral complexity while allowing each component to be attended to and practiced sufficiently to foster relevant learning.

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2. As the unit on job search strategies continued, all students developed a personal resume, working individually with Jaswinder on a micro-computer in the project office. Note in regard the school example that the majority of the women had children attending school and the remainder had children who would soon be entering school.

Appendix A. Frequency of Uses of English and Literacy at Beginning of Project, End of Project, and Four Months Later

Frequency scale: 1=never; 2=less than once per month; 3=once per month; 4=once per week; 5=three times per week; 6=daily.

Reading in English

R1: reading newspapers
R2: reading for information
R3: reading in one's spare time

Writing in English

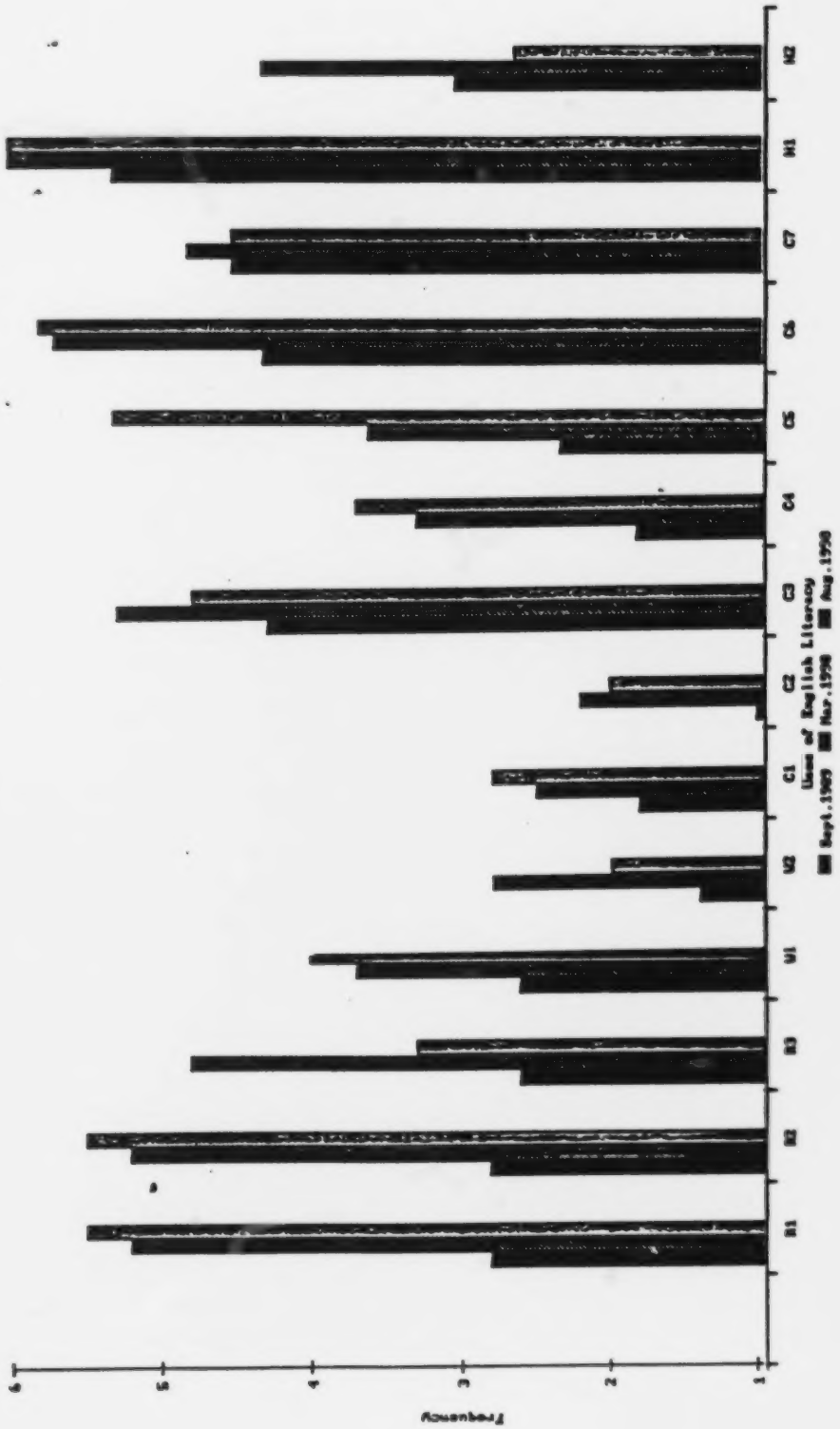
W1: filling in basic forms
W2: writing in one's spare time

Community Uses of English

C1: using the library
C2: using the health unit
C3: taking telephone messages
C4: making phone calls
C5: interacting in children's school life
C6: daily routines
C7: shopping and banking

Home Uses of English

H1: reading mail
H2: studying English at home


M2
M1
C7
C6
C5
C4
C3
C2
C1
W2
W1
B3
B2
B1
Uses of English Literacy
Sept.1989
Mar.1990
Aug.1990
6
5
4
3
2
1
Frequency